

## **Innovative E-OneStop in Sunnyvale, California improves service to residents and saves time, money**

The City of Sunnyvale is one of the earliest municipal adopters in the U.S. of technology that makes City Hall available to its customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Sunnyvale's innovative E-OneStop service lets residents and businesses access property information, apply for permits, and schedule inspections through an easy-to-navigate website. Sunnyvale's E-OneStop includes the most comprehensive package of online features in any jurisdiction in the nation, and its technology is available to any community that wants to use the Internet to expand its delivery of services to residents and businesses.

### **Background**

The City of Sunnyvale, population 131,700, is located in the heart of California's "Silicon Valley," the internationally-recognized center for technology innovation. The city was incorporated in 1912 and has changed dramatically since its start as a farm community filled with ranches and orchards. When Lockheed Missiles & Space Co. came to Sunnyvale in 1956, large tracts of suburban housing were built to accommodate the influx of new residents. In the 1970s and 1980s another construction boom occurred when technology companies experienced rapid growth and needed to expand from start-up R&D space to massive campuses to house the corporate headquarters of such companies as Advanced Micro Devices, National Semiconductor, Amdahl, Broadcom and Yahoo. Yet another wave of growth hit the City of Sunnyvale when the dot-com boom was at its peak. Construction valuation totaled over \$500 million in Fiscal Year 00/01, an increase of 250% over the average.

With all of this growth and change, it is not surprising that one of the busiest places in the City of Sunnyvale is the office that handles applications for building permits for residents and businesses. Even though new construction may have slowed during the economic downturn, owners of residential (single and multi-family) and commercial properties are still moving ahead with repairs, remodels and upgrades. Sunnyvale is located in one of the most expensive housing markets in the world so any investment in a property will result in a good return on that investment.

For many years, Sunnyvale has striven for excellence in city management, and the City has won numerous awards for its achievements in this area. One special focus has been on ways to streamline the building permit process. It was the first city in the U.S. to provide a centralized building permit center for customer convenience. Established in 1984, the One Stop Permit Center put all departments and divisions related to building permits in one place so that customers could visit one location to take care of their business rather than go from office to office in City Hall or offsite locations obtaining the required approvals. It sounds like common sense, but it was a radical departure from the way municipal permit business was conducted at the time. Some cities still have not centralized the permit process and residents in some communities are still forced to run from here to there and back again to obtain their permits.

The One-Stop Permit Center allows Sunnyvale to issue more than 90% of all building permits at the counter the same day the customer submits the plans. Only plans for new buildings and second story additions – less than 10% of all permits issued – are taken in for review and those are guaranteed to be reviewed within 21 days. State law requires review within 30 days. In 1993, a popular book by David Osborne called “Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming Government” features a section on Sunnyvale’s pioneering one-stop permit concept.

Although these were significant accomplishments for a municipal government, the City of Sunnyvale knew that the technology innovations being developed – many in the offices and labs of its own corporate citizens – held tremendous potential for using the Internet to improve the delivery of service to its residents. Sunnyvale was proud of its reputation for leading edge management practices and a real commitment to customer service, so the idea of an online permit center was more than appealing. City leaders viewed it as a necessity if Sunnyvale was to fulfill its mission and goals, especially these three policy statements from the Sunnyvale General Plan:

- Ensure that all citizens have access to City personnel, policy makers and services
- Continue to provide a central information center to assist citizens in locating and using City services
- Provide an environment which fosters a sense of positive identity on the part of citizens and staff

The challenge was to figure out how to take advantage of emerging Internet technology and popularity to make the permit process even more customer friendly. There was no software developed to help cities provide online permit services, and it would require a shift in longstanding procedures that were familiar and comfortable to staff, residents, developers and others in the community. The City had limited resources available to pay for software development.

The first opportunity to explore web-based services came in 1994 when a regional project called Joint Venture: Silicon Valley launched an initiative called Smart Permit™ to examine how technology could be used to transform ways business was conducted in Silicon Valley. More than 20 jurisdictions discussed how they could work together to use technology in their permitting processes and eight communities, including Sunnyvale, agreed to serve as pilot cities. They worked together to adopt Uniform Local Amendments and Interpretations of the Uniform Building Code as a start, and in 1996, the Smart Permit™ project challenged private vendors to create a web-based permit tracking system. Although seven companies indicated some interest, progress was slow.

As much as the City of Sunnyvale applauded and supported the efforts of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley, its Smart Permit™ initiative was moving too slowly for a city that wanted to be aggressive in enacting significant and rapid change. In 1997 Sunnyvale had installed a new software system called SPS which contained four Internet-ready modules: 1) land /parcel /GIS, 2) code compliance, 3) planning and 4) building / inspection. Sunnyvale was ready and eager to move to the next step of actually offering permit services online. So, in 1998, Sunnyvale decided

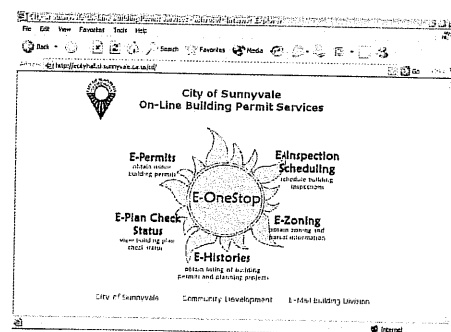
to explore its own in-house development of a proprietary online permit tracking system, a parallel effort to the Smart Permit™ activities still underway. Sunnyvale's entrepreneurial venture caught the attention of a neighboring jurisdiction, the City of Mountain View, and a corporation trying to establish a Silicon Valley presence – Microsoft. As part of its new community relations program, Microsoft donated about \$100,000 worth of technical support. The City of Mountain View also invested about \$50,000 in the Sunnyvale's development project in exchange for the right to use the software when it was ready. Sunnyvale itself invested about \$100,000 to the initial project development of an electronic permit system. Later enhancements were developed by City of Sunnyvale staff during regular work hours.

The goal was to create an online permit center that accomplished two objectives: 1) increased customer service by taking advantage of the round-the-clock availability of Internet resources from any computer anywhere; and 2) savings of staff time in handling routine permit inquiries and processing. The population of Sunnyvale is incredibly diverse (students in local schools speak 57 different languages and one in four residents was born outside of the United States). But it is also a population that is well educated and technologically savvy. Census data shows that 68.3% of Santa Clara Valley's residents have access to a computer. Sunnyvale's customers would be comfortable using the Internet to take care of their permit business.

### **Innovative Software Launched**

The first online service was called E-permit and it debuted in October 1999. E-Permits allowed customers to obtain minor building permits completely online without ever visiting City Hall. Available permits in this first "rev" included: re-roofs, furnace replacements, electrical service upgrades, water heater replacement, masonry fireplace repair, residential sewer and water line replacements, and residential tub and shower enclosure replacement.

The City of Sunnyvale continued to develop additional related online services and in 2001 packaged them together as the E-OneStop, a virtual version of the One Stop Permit Center. It can be found on the Internet at [www.e-onestop.net](http://www.e-onestop.net) or one click from the City's website, [www.ci.sunnyvale.ca.us](http://www.ci.sunnyvale.ca.us). Over the past three years, Sunnyvale's E-OneStop has expanded to include additional services – making it the most comprehensive package on online permit services available from any jurisdiction. The E-OneStop service is supported by a team of City employees from the Community Development, Public Works, Public Safety, Finance and IT departments.



Here are all of the services that the public can access online, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week rather than making a trip to City Hall during the work week:

- **17 E-permits**

From its start with 10 different permits available online, customers can now apply for 17 permits for the following projects:

- kitchen remodel
- reroof
- skylights
- swimming pool removal
- sewer lines
- tub and shower
- water heater
- water piping
- water service line
- air conditioning
- masonry repair of chimney
- electrical panel
- furnace
- gas line
- lighting switches and receptacles
- portable or above ground spa
- irrigation sprinklers

The screenshot shows the 'City of Sunnyvale On-Line Building Permit Services' website. It is at 'Step 1: Select permits'. Instructions state: 'To begin your permit order, check the requirements below, select the permits you need, and click the Continue button.' Requirements listed include: 'A MasterCard or Visa credit card', 'Each online building permit order can have only one address', and 'Check that each permit conforms to the zoning at the address'. There are three main sections of checkboxes: CONSTRUCTION (Kitchen - removal requirements, Reroof requirements, Skylight requirements, Swimming Pool Removal requirements), PREPARED (Sewer Line requirements, Tub and Shower requirements, Water Heater requirements, Water Piping - inside house requirements, Water Service Line - outside house requirements), and ENERGY (Air Conditioning requirements, Chimney - masonry repair requirements, Electrical Panel requirements, Furnace requirements, Gas Line requirements, Lighting - switches or receptacles requirements, Spa - portable or above ground requirements). A 'Continue' button is at the bottom.

Requirements for each type of project can be accessed with one click. This allows the customer to be aware of what will be required before starting the project and it serves as a checklist for the customer before applying for an inspection. Here is an example of the requirement information provided for a very common, routine household project – replacement of a water heater:

#### Water Heater Permit Requirements

This permit will allow replacement of your existing gas or electric water heater in the same location. The following are the minimum requirements that must be met:

- \* The zoning at the address must be residential.
- \* The new water heater is replaced in the same location as the current water heater.
- \* The new water heater is seismically strapped. Your contractor or the Building Safety Division can provide information for properly securing the water heater.
- \* The new water heater is between 30 and 150 gallons.
- \* The new gas water heater must be 18" above the floor when located in the garage.
- \* A fuel burning (gas) water heater must have proper combustion air.
- \* A fuel burning (gas) water heater may not be installed in a sleeping room, bathroom, bedroom, or clothes closet.
- \* The pressure relief valve must terminate outside of the house or at another location approved by the City of Sunnyvale.

This Water Heater Permit is NOT available if you are:

- \* Installing the new water heater in a different location.
- \* Installing a water heater larger than 150 gallons.

## Inspections

A final inspection is required after the water heater has been installed. That inspection can be scheduled with the e-Permits process, online at a later date, or directly with the Building Safety Division at (408) 730-7444.

- **E-Inspection Scheduling**

Customers can schedule a building inspection online. An online calendar shows available dates and times. The software confirms that permit information is already in the system before confirming an inspection time.

The screenshot shows the 'Schedule an Inspection' page. It includes a navigation bar with 'Permits', 'Inspections', 'Plan Checks', 'Histories', and 'My Account'. The main heading is 'Schedule an Inspection'. Below it, instructions state: 'Please enter a permit number or a Sunnyvale address, then enter the required inspection information below. To enter an inspection date, you can enter a date in the Inspection Date field or click on a date link in the calendar.' It notes that inspections are performed Monday thru Friday, with requests received before 5:00 pm scheduled for the following business day, and requests received after 5:00 pm scheduled at least two business days later. The form fields include: 'Permit Number' (with a dropdown and example 20021234), 'Address' (with a dropdown and example 458 Olive, 850 N Olive Ave #123), 'Inspection Date' (with a calendar for May 2003 showing dates 27 through 31), 'Time' (radio buttons for AM 8:30am - 1:00pm and PM 12:00noon - 4:30pm), 'Type' (radio buttons for Regular and Final), 'Requester' (with a dropdown), and 'Phone' (with a dropdown and example 123-456-7890). A 'Schedule inspection' button is at the bottom.

- **E-Plan Check Status Comments**

Customers can view the status of building plans that have been submitted for review. After the plan check is complete, the comments for all departments/division reviewing the plans are available online. If the customer tries to obtain comments before they are complete, the screen will tell them that the work is "in progress."

The screenshot shows the 'View Plan Check Status' page. It includes the same navigation bar as the previous page. The main heading is 'View Plan Check Status'. Below it, instructions state: 'Please enter a permit number or a Sunnyvale address'. The form fields include: 'Permit Number' (with a dropdown and example 20021234), 'Address' (with a dropdown and example 458 Olive, 850 N Olive Ave #123), and a 'View Plan Check' button.

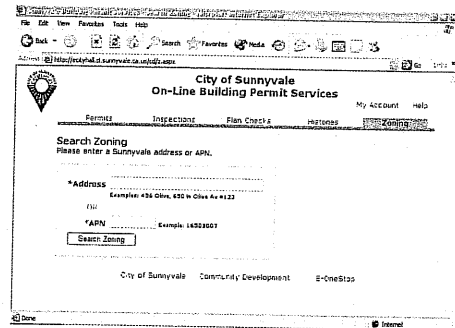
- **E-Histories**

Customers can obtain a complete history of all building permits and planning projects. Searches can be done either by property address or Assessor's Parcel Number (APN).

The screenshot shows the 'Search Permit History' page. It includes the same navigation bar as the previous pages. The main heading is 'Search Permit History'. Below it, instructions state: 'Please enter a Sunnyvale address or APN'. The form fields include: 'Address' (with a dropdown and example 458 Olive, 850 N Olive Ave #123), 'APN' (with a dropdown and example 14023007), and a 'Search History' button.

- **E-Zoning**

Information about individual properties is available online, including the zoning district, flood zone, lot size and number of dwelling units.



All of the interactive components of the E-OneStop are programmed to verify information that is input from customers. Once the information is confirmed as accurate, the data is automatically transferred to Sunnyvale's in-house permit tracking system. No additional staff time is needed for data input.

The information customers receive online is "live," meaning that it is the same current information that staff has at its fingertips. It is accurate, up-to-date, and real-time.

### **Comprehensive Online Services**

With the addition of the E-Zoning online service, the City of Sunnyvale has become the first city to offer a comprehensive package of online permit services to its customers. It is meeting its goal of providing increased convenience for customers while saving staff time. It is estimated that each E-OneStop transaction saves customers (residents, contractors, Realtors and others) 1.5 to 2 hours of travel and in-office time plus an unquantifiable amount of stress. It also reduces staff workload by an average of 15 minutes per transaction, which has already enabled the City to reduce counter staff positions by one FTE.

Here is a summary of how E-OneStop online services have grown in just the last year:

<b>E-OneStop Service</b>	<b>Transactions in 2003</b>	<b>Transactions in 2002</b>	<b>Percentage increase</b>	<b>Approximate number of staff hours saved (2003)</b>
E-permits	565	159	255%	141
E-histories	6,355	1,538	313%	1,059
E-inspection scheduling	591	133	344%	98
E-plan check status and comments	475	122	289%	118
E-zoning	3,294	572	476%	549

Clearly, the biggest impact has been on requests for the permit history of a property. Staff at the One-Stop Permit Center used to deal with 25-30 customers a week who came in person to request building and planning permit records for a specific property. Other requests would come in by telephone or fax. Customers were asked to either pay for copies or the information was faxed to their home or office. As a result of the availability of E-Histories online, City staff now rarely get a call for this service. The information is available on demand, 24/7, without a cost to either the customer or the City.

### **Difference From Other Jurisdictions**

Several other jurisdictions in the U.S. offer some version of electronic permits, but no city has an online service as comprehensive as Sunnyvale. Customers are allowed to use credit cards online to pay for permits and they do not have to pay a fee or arrange for an electronic signature. Sunnyvale allows the use of an online signature, in accordance with Civil Code 1633.1 et seq., to authorize some inspections to be conducted without the presence of the property owner or contractor. These inspections are for items that do not require entry into the building, such as a check of a re-roof project.

City of Sunnyvale staff continues to work on new features to add to the E-OneStop to improve its service to customers. In the works is electronic plan submittal which will allow customers to submit plans for review and pay the plan check fees electronically. The main obstacle discovered during this beta test is the variety of software used by architects, designers and engineers. There are many different software programs in use, so it is difficult to design an online service that can accommodate them all. City staff is now working on a way to make electronic plan submittal feasible for the entire construction industry.

Although the E-OneStop is not specifically mentioned, the City of Sunnyvale believes it contributed significantly to a recent achievement by the City. In April, 2003, Sunnyvale received the coveted California Award for Performance Excellence (CAPE) from the California Council for Excellence. Sunnyvale is the first city in California to be given the award.

The CAPE award recognizes Sunnyvale's innovative organizational effectiveness initiative and on-going efforts to deliver the highest quality services and programs. The award is patterned after the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program, which annually recognizes high-performing businesses, health care organizations, and educational institutions.

Sunnyvale was selected to receive the CAPE Bronze Award following a three-day on-site review from a team of CAPE examiners that looked at the City's systems and practices. City staff submitted an extensive application describing how Sunnyvale addresses seven criteria for the award, including customer and market focus, business results, process management, and strategic planning.

### **A Replicable Model for Other Cities**

Sunnyvale's innovative proprietary software for internal tracking and E-OneStop services has been licensed to GovPartner (a division of Berryman and Henigar) in San Diego, California. GovPartner markets, sells, installs, and maintains the online software programs for other jurisdictions throughout the U.S. The City of Sunnyvale receives a percentage of sales revenue from GovPartner to add to its General Fund.

Many cities throughout California have inquired about the software and three cities – Mountain View, Laguna Hills and Rancho Santa Margarita – have implemented some of the online permitting features. Two other California cities, Chino Hills and Union City, plus Urbadale, Iowa have purchased the back-end portion of the E-OneStop system and plan to introduce online permitting soon. The number of cities requesting information and demonstrations has increased since the City of Sunnyvale was awarded the California League of Cities Helen Putnam Award for Excellence in the fall of 2003. The main obstacles to other cities implementing the full E-OneStop program seem to be the lack of information in electronic form and limited budgets. With adequate funding and a commitment to move City Hall records and accessibility into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, any jurisdiction in America can implement an E-OneStop system.



## **Summary**

### **Innovative E-OneStop in Sunnyvale, California improves service to residents and saves time, money**

Sunnyvale, California is one of the first cities in the U.S. to effectively use web-based technology to make City Hall available to its customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Sunnyvale's innovative E-OneStop service lets residents and businesses use the Internet to access property information, apply for permits, and schedule inspections through an easy-to-navigate website. There are other jurisdictions offering some version of electronic permits, but no city has developed an online service as comprehensive as Sunnyvale.

E-OneStop allows customers to complete many activities from the comfort and convenience of their own home or office. Customers can use credit cards online to pay for permits and an electronic signature for authorization. E-OneStop services include:

- **E-Permits:** for obtaining 17 different permits from installation of irrigation sprinklers to kitchen remodels. Requirements for each type of project is listed.
- **E-Inspection Scheduling:** for scheduling a building inspection at the convenience of the customer
- **E-Plan Check Status and Comments:** for viewing the status of building plans submitted for review and reading comments from all departments/divisions reviewing the plans.
- **E-Histories:** for obtaining a complete history of all building permits and planning projects on a specific property.
- **E-Zoning:** for obtaining information on zoning district, flood zone, lot size and dwelling units.

In 2003, E-OneStop transactions included: 565 E-permits; 6,355 E-histories; 591 E-inspection scheduling; 475 E-plan check status; 412 E-plan check comments; and 3,294 E-zoning.

Each E-OneStop transaction saves customers a trip to City Hall and hours of time. It also reduces staff workload by a minimum of 15 minutes per transaction, which adds up to thousands of hours of staff time over the course of the year.

Sunnyvale's innovative proprietary software for internal tracking and E-OneStop services is available to any community that wants to use the Internet to expand its delivery of services to residents and businesses. It has been licensed to a private firm which markets, sells, installs, and maintains the online software programs. The City of Sunnyvale receives a percentage of sales revenue to add to its General Fund.